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The Unprejudiced Laymen's

FREE THOUGHTS.

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UNPREJUDIC'D LAYMEN'S
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ON THE
SUBJECT
THE
CONVOCATION
Are upon.

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SInce Laymen are to be concerned in passing into a Law what shall be proposed by the Convocation; and since they are like to be concern'd in their Estates, if any Disturbance arise to the State by our Divisions, I thought it might be proper enough to give some general Hints of the Sense and Thoughts of many of them, concerning these Matters. The mischievous Consequences of our Differences being not only Spiritual but Temporal: and I hope my good Intention will somewhat atone, if sometimes I transgress the Limits of my Station; every one ought to contribute their best Endeavours to promote Peace and Unity——This I am now about is the *best Peace-Offering* I can make: The Widow's Mite (it being her all) was well accepted.

The Truth is, That ſome of the truly zealous (tho' leſs thinking) Divines and Laity on each Side, and ſome of the more Intrieguing and Deſigning of both thoſe ſorts, have drawn in and ſpirited each other, into theſe, not only unneceſſary, but moſt pernitious Quarrels, about indifferent things.

This Fire of Contention (for at leaſt an hundred Years) hath ſometimes been kept ſmothering in, and ſometimes (*Veſuvius* like) hath burſt out into ſuch Flames, as hath endangered the whole Country round about, and never, in all this Time, hath been quite quenched. What hath been, may be again, the ſame Cauſe continuing, the like fatal Circumſtances may ſometime or other return; therefore, let's be wiſe at laſt, and every one throw in his Bucket of Water, to try, if we can throughly quench this (almoſt Veſtal) Fire: And that we may put it out of all poſſibility, ever more to come to a Tryal by Battle, an antiquated and barbarous way in the Opinion of all Divines (tho' I have heard of a Drum Eccleſiaſtick, that hath excited and ſtirred up People to theſe Quarrels.) But yet let us uſe proper Methods, and do nothing in Tumult and Confuſion, leſt (as in quenching of Fire) we obſtruct and hinder the deſired effect of our good Intentions.

Therefore let's firſt leave the Buſineſs wholy to the Convocation, ('tis their proper Province) the next Seſſion may ('tis hoped) be more propitious than the laſt —— And let us make it our humble Requeſt to this Reverend Aſſembly, That they would pleaſe, in good earneſt, to uſe their beſt Endeavours to compoſe our Differences.

And

And let us alſo, every one, in his proper Sphere, and Station, perſwade, entreat, and diſpoſe one another, to Moderation and Compliance.

And if all this will not produce the deſired effect, 'tis ſomewhat doubtful whether any Remedy can be found out, which will not be worſe than the Diſeaſe. To prevent which will ſurely be the Concern and Buſineſs of the Convocation.

'Tis true indeed ſome of the moſt Pious and Learned of our Church ('tis alſo hop'd there are ſuch among the Diſſenters) do earneſtly labour in this Cauſe: And will the reſt only *pray for the peace of Jeruſalem*, and not put to their helping Hand, and be ſtirring and active to promote it.

One can never too often recount how unreaſonable a thing it is, That ſome Indifferent Things ſhould be the chief Source and Original from whence hath riſen and been continued, thoſe Diſturbances which have ſo long craz'd and ſhatter'd, and ſometimes even diſſolved the very Nature and Being of our Government.

We have for theſe fifty Years, at leaſt, been labouring under a floating, unſteady Government, tottering and reeling, firſt to one ſide, then to the other; and by alternate Repetitions, of Perſecutions and Indulgences, both Parties have fallen ſo foul upon, and been ſo daſh'd one againſt the other: That thereby both were grown ſo Feeble and Weak —— That a third interloping Party (watching their Opportunity) was very near obtaining an abſolute Victory over both— Through the kind Aſſiſtance of our two laſt Monarchs;

narchs; the one, by the underhand Way of Leger-demain and Hocus Pocus, (the proper Abbreviation of *Hoc eſt Corpus*) the other, by the way of bare-fac'd, *HOC EST CORPUS*, at full length.

And while we lay thus groveling and ſtrugling under this diſmal Fate—And when we were even *become as a Prey to our Enemies.*——When the Victim was juſt ready to be ſlain.——Then it was, our Gracious Sovereign came, and ſtopp'd the Hand.——And by vaſt Expence and great Hazard of Life, reſcued us out of the very Jaws of, otherwiſe, inevitable Ruine and Deſtruction.

We muſt needs therefore owne, there is a great Weight of Gratitude lies upon us, for this ſo great and almoſt miraculous Deliverance.

Yet the Return, for all this, which to his Majeſty, would be moſt grateful, is, Only that we would live in Peace and Unity amongſt our ſelves.

An eaſie acknowledgment ſure, ſince, we our ſelves ſhall receive the greateſt Benefit thereby.

Hereby alſo we ſhall pay (thus eaſily) a part of the greateſt Debt of Gratitude, that e're was due from a Nation relieved out of the greateſt Thraldome and Miſery.

Let our Gratitude therefore, next to the Divine Precept, be the chief Motive to Peace and Reconciliation among our ſelves, let us add alſo all the diſmal Conſequences of our Diviſions—And let us alſo reflect, and conſider, That while we ſtrive and contend about theſe Indifferent Things, to ſuch a degree, as not only to ſhake, but alſo ſometimes to overturn all our Conſtitutions both Eccleſiaſtical and Civil: We do there-

by

by expose the Wisdom, Piety, and Vertue, both of our Church and State, to the too just Censure of all our Neighbours.

And now, when all these Considerations are put together, one would think, we, *being Brethren, should strive* and contend no more, unless, which should first comply to, or which should first yield up these indifferent things.

Or at least, since neither Party is altogether so *guiltless as to throw the first Stone*, sure they will both joyn, and cast in their best Assistance to heal and fill up our Breaches.

And for our encouragement, we are now sure, we have a King and Court, who will not be made Engines, to be play'd off, first against one Party, then against the other; by those Incendiaries, who by those Batteries, hoped to have obtained an entire Conquest over both.

We are also sure we have a King, who, in good earnest, will give all such Encouragement to this Reverend Assembly, as they shall reasonably desire.

His Majesty's Charity, indeed, seems so extensive as to reach so far, that all such as can't comply for Conscience-sake, should be shelter'd from Persecution, so long as they behave themselves peaceably in the State, and decently towards the Church.

And this Charity is so limited, as not to give the least Encouragement to any of their unaccountable Errors or Mistakes:——And yet this, (which is only true Charity) is by some, censur'd as a too much siding with Dissenters;——'Tis a very unaccountable thing that a prudent well-

bounded Charity (the beſt of Graces) eminent in the beſt of Kings, ſhould by ſome, of the beſt of Churches, be cenſur'd as a fault; eſpecially, ſince his Majeſty hath given our Church ſo many repeated Aſſurances of his Favour and Protection.

The Members of the Convocation are Perſons of the greateſt Character for Learning, Piety, and Prudence. And 'twas hop'd their *Moderation* would (at this juncture) *have appeared to all Men*; and that (the laſt Seſſions) they would have made ſome Advance, ſome Step at leaſt, towards our Peace and Unity.--- For, before they met, never ſince the Reformation, was there a more auſpicious Conjunction of Hopes and Probabilities, of Pacification and Compoſure of our Differences: But alas! from how great Hopes are we fallen, *The wicked one hath ſtollen in, and ſown his Tares* of Diviſion *amongſt this beſt Wheat:* for, no ſooner were they met, but ſome of them divided and ſorted themſelves into Parties, others (as is ſaid) in their Writings made ſharp and ſevere Reflections on each other (the moſt ready and fatal way, ſure, to ſtifle all Overtures of Peace and Reconciliation in the very Embryo.)

However, let us not yet deſpair of Succeſs, notwithſtanding all theſe ill-boding Omens of our future Hopes: ——— For tho' the beſt of Men are ſubject to Infirmities, yet ſuch, (and ſuch are theſe Reverend Perſons) ſooneſt own, and retract, if in any thing, they have acted, not altogether ſo ſuitably to their innate Piety and Vertue.

There

Therefore 'tis to be hop'd, That this Receſs hath been a happy Opportunity, for all Perſons concerned, to ſearch into the very ſecret Receſſes of their Hearts, to try, whether Paſſion, Prejudice or Intereſt, *&c.* hath not too much prevailed laſt ſitting:——— And if ſo, 'tis alſo hoped, they have, in this Interval, diveſted themſelves, and ſhaken off thoſe entangling and deſtructive Remora's of our Peace——And that thoſe Reverend Perſons will return with ſuch a Primitive Meekneſs and Sincerity as ſhall become their Character and Function.

The Face of Things, ſince the laſt ſitting, ſeem ſomewhat altered, which poſſibly may much diſpoſe the Convocation to come to ſuch a Temper of Tenderneſs towards Diſſenters as was promiſed——Though 'tis true, too much Streſs ought not to be laid upon that Promiſe, becauſe moſt of thoſe Reverend Fathers who made it, cannot (by Reaſon of Conſcience) qualifie themſelves to be Legal Members thereof.

Yet if thoſe Reverend Fathers would pleaſe to diſpoſe thoſe to ſo good a Work, over whom they have an Influence, it would (no doubt) very much expedite the Work (perhaps they do), and this would alſo go in Diſcharge, and acquit all of their Promiſe; for by ſo doing, it would appear they did their utmoſt towards the Performance thereof.

Though, I confeſs, to requeſt them to be aiding and aſſiſting, and to ſolicit that others may *labour* in that *Vineyard* out of which they are debarred, requires ſo much Self-

denyal, that it can ſcarce with Modeſty be deſired.

This Promiſe was general, in the Name of the whole Body; The whole Convocation (no doubt) give a great Deference to the Learning, Piety and Prudence of theſe Reverend Fathers, and do (I ſuppoſe) account themſelves ſomewhat engaged to the Performance of this Promiſe:——Therefore we cannot but hope, ſtill, that ſome Regard will be had to it, and that ſomething will be done.——Beſides, if nothing be done, ſome will be apt to cenſure, That in that Promiſe, there was too great an Alloy of Human Policy, to be ſincere.

But to come ſomewhat nearer to the Buſineſs, moſt free reaſoning, and (I hope) pious Men of the Nation, account themſelves unintereſted and uningaged in a Party, concerning theſe indifferent Things in Diſpute, between Conformiſt and Nonconformiſt, ſo as, to account them unalterable, and ſo as to countenance the ſtiff Oppoſition that is made by many; ſuch have all-a-long, and of late, more plainly diſcerned, that the one Party have too rigidly adhered to, and the other too violently oppoſed, our Preſent Eſtabliſhment.

Perhaps ſome of the *Diſſenters* have been, and are infinitely to blame, by their indecent and turbulent Oppoſition: And may it not be alſo ſaid to ſome of our Church, that they have in theſe matters behaved themſelves like Men ſubject to Infirmities.

Therefore

Therefore ſuch free reaſoning Perſons as above, though they may think the *Diſſenters* much more in fault; yet ſuch (with ſubmiſſion) think that ſome things, in our preſent Eſtabliſhment, are defended with difficulty enough.

Such therefore could heartily wiſh, that for Peace and Unity's ſake, in Church and State, (the moſt powerful of Arguments) and alſo, as it is a thing in ſome meaſure, in its own nature, fit to be done;

That this Reverend Aſſembly would pleaſe to render our Eccleſiaſtical Conſtitutions as rational and accountable as the Subſtantials of our Religion are, *ſo that he that runs may read.* That is to ſay, that they would pleaſe to compile ſuch a *Liturgy*, *Articles*, *Canons*, and other Eccleſiaſtical Conſtitutions, as may ſit ſo cloſe and fit to the Rule of Scripture, as to leave no ſpace nor room for Scruple or Exception for any rational Man, of the ſoberer Party of either ſide, (as to indifferent things which are alterable.)

This to many may not only ſeem a very difficult undertaking, but will alſo be cenſured as a Chimæra, or ſome *Utopian* Fancy; ——— yet conſideration will much abate the difficulty thereof, and render it more practicable than ſome may think. ——— Surely this may be done; and if it may, 'twould at any time be expedient to be done: But at this time neceſſary, far more neceſſary than to write Rationals of ſomewhat ſtrain'd and far fetch'd Arguments, to defend our preſent Eſtabliſhment, (though thoſe might be of uſe, when the times would

would not bear Alterations and Amendments,) this rigid way of forcing Conformity is not practicable now; therefore other methods ought to be used. And if that which is just now hinted at, cannot be so exactly performed; yet if but the most material things objected against, were taken away, this in a great measure would do the work ('tis probable.)

For by this means ('tis suppos'd) the *Presbyterian* Party (perhaps some others) would come in upon such an Act of Comprehension; and then the Faction in the State would be broken. For though they may count themselves so fast bound, and wreathed, and twisted together, that the Gordian Knot may sooner be unloos'd, than they separated; yet by this means they would dissolve and fall asunder as readily as *Sampson*'s Withs. The best Artificers can't work without Tools. And by this means the over-ballance of Parties would be so unproportionable, that the State for all future Ages would scarce ever be in the least hazard of disturbance from *Dissenters*.

And besides, the inequality of number, the remaining *Dissenters* would but be a shattered divided Party, inconsistent among themselves, and easily managed, if they should offer the least disturbance.

Again, if the Indulgence be continued to such as shall not comply, they will thereby be in as good a condition as under any Government (better than under the *Presbyterian*) unless their own was uppermost, and one Party can but hope for that, therefore they are better as they

are,

ate, if they were to caſt Lots which Party ſhould be uppermoſt in the Government, unleſs the reſt were almoſt ſure of an Indulgence, but the *Diſſenters* are better as they are; *The Bird in Hand is worth two in the Buſh.*

And further, the Indulgence will be a check upon the remaining *Diſſenters*, and in the nature of a Recognizance of their good Behaviour towards the State: For if they ſhould offer to break the Peace, they would forfeit their Liberty, and be puniſh'd and cruſh'd as heretofore, and worſe (perhaps) their Party being ſo much leſſened.

So that by gaining one Party, the reſt will be ever unable (though never ſo willing) to hurt us.

I know Toleration or no Toleration is a large Field of Argument, and much (and much to the purpoſe) may be ſaid on either ſide; I ſhall only, to what is aforeſaid, add my further Thoughts, and not condemn or cenſure thoſe of a contrary Opinion.

Therefore as to the Out lyers, who won't, or (as they ſay) can't come within the pale of ſuch a Comprehenſion, They are too wild to be forced in; to endeavour it, would be trouble and toyl, and loſt labour in the end. Therefore ſure it will be more adviſable to let them go at large, and the Church will not have much reaſon to murmur or complain; becauſe thoſe within the Comprehenſion will have taken up all the good feeding Paſtures; the Out-lyers lot therefore will but light in a *barren Land.* 'Tis true, they will have ſcope and room enough

to

to roam about (in which they delight perhaps) but they will but have somewhat a pinching Pasture. 'Tis but fit indeed they should suffer something, since they won't be contain'd within any reasonable Bounds.

But to be a little more serious in this Matter: Custom and Education makes and creates Consciences in many; how can he but think that to be sinful, which he hath been long used to think so, and which he hath all along been told was so, by those upon whose Judgment he must needs rely: For since 'tis but few who are able to judge for themselves, all the rest must rely upon some body; and upon whom sooner, than upon their Parents, Friends, and Acquaintance, and such Guides as they shall recommend to them.——— Such therefore are in a manner under a fatal necessity to continue in the same way.

And yet however slight the foundations may be, upon which such build their Faith; yet they are so fix'd therein, that rather than do otherwise than they have been used and taught; they will sometimes suffer loss of Goods, Imprisonment, *&c.*

All People will own, 'tis pity such Constancy should not be better directed. And is it not also pity they should be punisht for that which is so well intended? For they are in the right, to the best of their knowledge; and they have taken the best method to settle their Judgments, they were capable of.

'Tis

'Tis alſo a vain Attempt for any Man to hope by Argument and Perſuaſion to overcome invincible Ignorance: How rare is it that a *Nonconformiſt*'s Child (if religious at all, unleſs bred in the Univerſities) proves a *Conformiſt*, and the contrary much more rare?

'Tis true, ſome may refuſe to comply, out of Faction, or ſome other ſiniſter Ends; but ſince 'tis difficult to point out who thoſe are, and inconvenient to leave that to the Arbitrary Diſcretion of a Magiſtrate, it ſeems ſomewhat too ſevere to fix a certain Puniſhment to an uncertain Crime. Where Laws inflict a Penalty, the Proof ought to be direct and plain.

And I can't ſee why an Act of Comprehenſion and an Indulgence may not be conſiſtent; and ſurely the beſt, if not the only means, whereby all the *Diſſenters* will either conform, or live in Peace and Amity among their Neighbours.

But if there ſhould ſtill be any ſuch reſtleſs Spirits, as to carry on the old Feuds and Heats againſt the Church, they would but thereby loſe, and our Church infinitely gain ground: Then that compaſſionate regard that many had heretofore ſhewn them, would (after the Church had thus condeſcended for Peace) be turn'd into a diſlike and averſation.

The Church by theſe Conceſſions would be ſo firmly eſtabliſh'd, that if ſuch ill Men ſhould ſtill continue their invidious Clamours againſt her, they would but thereby, like Waves, daſh themſelves againſt a Rock not to be moved.

And in return to ſuch expedient Conceſſions, the Church (no doubt) would receive from

the King and Parliament all ſuch Eſteem, Support and Aſſiſtance, as ſhe ſhould reaſonably deſire.——— And from the generality of all ſober and reaſonable Men, all ſuch Honor and Reverence as ſhall ever be due to the beſt of Men. ——— Hereby the Church would erect to her ſelf (in the Hearts of the moſt good and wiſe of this and all future Generations) an Everlaſting Monument, of being the Healer of thoſe Breaches that have ſo long embroyl'd and ſhaken both Church and State.

To the Diſſenters.

And if the Church come to ſuch a temper of tenderneſs towards *Diſſenters* (as is ſuppos'd) ſurely they will come to ſuch a temper of Prudence and Moderation as gratefully to accept thereof. And though the Terms may ſeem (to them) ſomewhat narrow and ſtrait; yet let them turn the Point of the Dagger againſt their own Breaſts, and conſider what they would do in the like caſe, if their Church Government was uppermoſt in the State, and eſtabliſht by Law, Whether it would not then be difficult to perſwade them to recede from any of their Conſtitutions, (though indifferent things,) however, Whether they would not be very ſparing in yielding, and yield with ſome reluctancy: And whether many of the Objections now raiſed by the Church, would not then be raiſed by Them.

One may have a probable gueſs by what is paſt, what will happen again in the like caſe.

But

But I ſhall not go about to rip up any Paſſages of thoſe times, when the Church of *England* were the Sufferers; my deſign being to pour in Water, to quench, not Oyl, to encreſe the Flame.

'Tis rumour'd abroad, as if the *Diſſenters* would never be ſatisfied, unleſs Epiſcopal Church-Government be aboliſht. —— But I take this as a Calumny caſt upon them, to make the Church jealous they deſign to rob her of her choiceſt Jewel; and that therefore the Church may keep them out of her Liberties, for fear of further danger.

Epiſcopal Church Government hath ever been preferred by the moſt learned of all Ages.

But admit it were a doubt (and that's as low as any fair reaſoning *Diſſenter* can deſire one to go) yet, Epiſcopacy being in Poſſeſſion, and eſtabliſht by Law, it ought for that reaſon to be continued; beſides, 'tis hazardous to make material Alterations, becauſe unforeſeen Inconveniencies may ariſe.

Again, the generality of the whole Body of the Nation, both Lords and Commons, will ſcarce ever admit of the *Presbyterian* Government here in *England*. —— The inconvenient Conſequences of that Diſcipline in the Church of *Scotland*, are too freſh in Peoples Memories to be ſo ſoon forgot.

To be check'd and controll'd by every Pariſh-Miniſter, not only in Spirituals, but in Temporals too (oft-times) in order thereunto, would but go harſhly down with a Nation that hath been ſo long accuſtomed to more eaſie and gentle Methods.

The *Diſſenters* (perhaps) may think, that as to worldly Intereſt, they are in as good a Condition now, by an *Act* of *Indulgence*, as by an *Act* of *Comprehenſion*. Be it ſo, yet there remains a Schiſm in the Church, and Diſturbance in the State, which are no ſlight Matters, but worthy of the ſerious conſideration of all good Men. Therefore if the Church be willing to yield, they ought to comply, if poſſible, though they can't have all they deſire.

Again, ſurely the *Diſſenters* won't only conſider the preſent time, but look forward for the ſake of thoſe who ſhall come after them; for though they may reſt ſatisfied, the *Indulgence* may continue for their time. Yet the Reverſion is always as valuable, at leaſt, as a Life-Eſtate in poſſeſſion (by all who have Heirs or Succeſſors.) Therefore let the *Diſſenters* conſider, that hereafter an *Act of Indulgence* may much ſooner be repeal'd than an *Act of Comprehenſion*; for the one is counted to heal as far as it goes, whereas the other keeps the Wound open; yet (I confeſs) that's better than (by force) to heal falſe.

And let the Diſſenters alſo further conſider, however ſure they may be of the Indulgence for their own time, yet the Grant is clogged with an implied Power of Revocation.

If the Convocation (as the Diſſenters may think) ſhall prove ſomewhat cloſe-handed, perhaps they may ſtand off, in Hopes a Parliament may undertake the Buſineſs, and be more liberal. ——— That's poſſible indeed, but at preſent, things ſeem not much to look that way, and if not at preſent, 'tis very uncertain when.

I have heard that ſomething of that Nature was moved in the laſt Parliament, but clearly carried to refer thoſe Matters to a Convocation.——'Tis ſcarce probable there will be fewer of the ſame Opinion in this Parliament.

If ſome preſent Favour ſeem intended to the Church, that perhaps may put the Convocation into a good Humour, to be kind to others, (the beſt of Men have their Ups and Downs) to ſtrike while the Iron's hot, may be good Advice.

And 'tis more particularly to be hoped the Convocation will, (at this Juncture), do ſomething tending to our Peace,——Becauſe, they very well know, that the doing thereof, will be the moſt acceptable Return they can make, for ſuch Favour to be ſhown: ſo that now, a double Gratitude will be added, to all the other Motives for Compliance and Peace, the one, for our general Deliverance, the other, for particular Favours ſhown.

Upon the whole Matter, it ſems adviſeable, That the Diſſenters (the more moderate Party however) abate as much as is poſſible, of what they hoped for.

And as in worldly Felicities, we may ſooner arrive to Peace and Tranquillity of mind by Subtraction than Addition; ſo in this Caſe, by the like Means we may ſooneſt attain the End of our Wiſhes, *viz.* Peace and Unity. 'Tis hop'd the Diſſenters will now act like Men of Piety and Prudence, and not like Engines in the Hands

Hands of others, to promote and continue a Faction in the State. 'Tis hoped the Church will do the like.

These Matters seem to be growing to a Crisis, let the Dissenters use means while there is Hopes, the Books may be closed ere long (perhaps) and then (probably) they may bid farewel to all Hopes of Accommodation for this Age: let them therefore vigorously sollicit this Matter, it requires their best dexterity of Address, and Quickness; to take Time by the Foretop, may perhaps be good and seasonable Advice.

Add to these Reasons, the Consideration, That while these unhappy Differences remain, it will be too much the Practice of most (as hitherto it hath been) to spend most of that Time (which ought to be dedicated to the more indispensible Duties of Christianity) in wrangling and contending about Rites and Ceremonies, *&c.* and thereby delude themselves with the Fancy, That all this while, they have been manifesting a Zeal in God's Cause.

And so, by placing to the Account of Religion, so much Time and so much Zeal, they think they are very ready to give an *account of their Stewardship* when called.

Whereas, in Truth, notwithstanding all this Pains and Travel, and Time spent, they are not advanced one Step in their Journey towards the heavenly Jerusalem; they are no forwarder, than he, who in some misty Daies loses his Way, and wanders up and down, until at last

laſt he come to the very place where he firſt ſet forward.

And after all, let the ſober Party of Diſſenters conſider, that it would be a very difficult Task, for the moſt learned of them, by fair Argument, to defend their Oppoſition and Separation from the Church.

Re-ordination (I hear) is one of the moſt material Things the Diſſenters object againſt.

If a Man have an Eſtate paſſed to him by ſuch Conveyance as he ſhall think ſufficient, yet if he hear another Man pretends a Title to it, he would deſire a Conveyance or Deed of Confirmation from that Perſon, becauſe of the poſſibility that he may have a Title; for many Doubts about Titles ariſe upon the various Interpretations of the Law.

Now by taking this ſecond Conveyance, no Man will ſay, The Party owns the firſt null and void, or that it is any waies invalidated thereby; and if it have any effect, it muſt be to convey a new Title, or corroborate the former.

Now in the Caſe of Re ordination, the Biſhops claim a Title (and unleſs in caſe of Neceſſity) the ſole Title and Power to confer Orders.——The Presbyterians too ſay, They have a Power to confer Orders.—— It ſeems therefore there is a Doubt, which Doubt muſt needs ariſe from the various Interpretation of the Law of God in that Caſe.

Therefore, methinks, if ſuch a Law be made as ſhall require Re-ordination, (the Epiſcopal Way of Ordaining being eſtabliſhed by Law) the Diſſenters ought to ſubmit to it, it may work

(*ad*

(*ad corroborandum*) at leaſt ſince there is a Doubt, however it no way invalidates their former Orders.

And let the Diſſenters conſider, That by ſo doing, the Peace and Unity in Church and State would be in a great meaſure ſettled—For (perhaps) moſt other Things would be agreed well enough.

On the other Hand, our Church owns, That in Caſe of Neceſſity others than Biſhops may confer Orders.——In the late Times, Orders from Presbyters was the Way in Practice and Uſe, and countenanced by Law; ſo that in thoſe Times they were under a ſort of Neceſſity to be ordained that way———Now if this will be allowed as a Neceſſity, then ſuch Ordinations then made are good and valid——— (If the poſitive Law of the Land hinder not), And the old Rule (*factum valet quod fieri non debet*) may help out ſomething in this Matter.

Therefore (upon the whole Matter) methinks this great Point may be compounded, *viz.* That all the Ordinations made in the Times above mentioned, be owned as good and valid: And that for the future, all Orders to be conferred by Biſhops only: And that thoſe be re-ordained who have been ordained by Presbyters ſince the Reſtauration of King *Charles* the Second.

I muſt beg Pardon of both Parties for intermedling in this Matter———A chance Propoſal or Expedient thrown in by an unſkilful Hand, hath ſometimes taken good Effect.

By talking thus coolly and indifferently between two Parties, I ſhall, moſt probably, be cenſured by ſome of each, as cold and lukewarm in Religion; yet let ſuch remember, That their Brandy like Heats (about Indifferent Things) hath almoſt overcome and extinguiſh'd the native Heat of that Religion, which is *Peaceable*, *Pure and Undefiled*: Their Heats have made Charity, (towards one another) cold, and Peace and Unity almoſt a Stranger among us.

Warmly to eſpouſe a Party, and ſeverely to chaſtiſe the other, that's the way to pleaſe, (I know) and to be accounted ſharp and quick Men.

But, for my part, I look upon Satyr but as a Reliſhing Bit to a wanton vitiated Pallat, which gives no ſolid Nouriſhment; eſpecially that way of Writing (I think) is ſcarce pardonable on this Subject: Yet if the Practice and uſage of ſome Divines may paſs for Authentick Precedents, few Writers fall more foul upon each other, than ſome of them upon this Subject, eſpecially the loſing Side makes good the Proverb to purpoſe: How oft do they make large Parentheſes of ſharp and unbecoming reflections, like foul Foot-Ball-Players, that leave the Ball and fall a ſquabling and breaking one another's Shins?

If in Diſcourſe a Perſon ſhould give you ſolid Arguments to perſwade, and, all on a ſudden, (before he ſtay to hear whether you be convinced) this Perſon ſhould ſtart up and

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draw his Sword, and fall a cutting and ſlaſhing you; to uſe no harſher Terms, would you not think this was a prepoſterous way to convince? ſome would be apt to ſay, This was ſome ſuddain Frenſie Fit; and that this Gentleman ought to be conveyed to a dark Room and clean Straw. The Tongue is a cutting Weapon too, and ſometimes juſt thus unreaſonably managed.

If Paſſion and Intereſt in theſe Matters could once be laid aſide, Peace and Unity would ſoon be reſtored.

'Tis true there is a Religious Zeal in Caſes of great Moment and Weight, which requires a Sharpneſs and Severity of Expreſſion.——— But methinks ſuch Concern and Earneſtneſs is not neceſſary, where People only differ in Opinion, whether ſuch or ſuch a thing be or be not in it's own Nature Indifferent, *&c.*——— And indeed, they ſeem the moſt (if not the only) proper Perſons to exerciſe this Religious Zeal; who have (in a manner) annihilated themſelves, as to the Intereſts and Concerns of this World, ſuch may moſt clearly diſtinguiſh between an Holy Zeal and a Corrupt Paſſion. And yet even ſuch very ſparingly make uſe of that Method.

Many Objections will be raiſed againſt what is here ſaid, but I am no good Exorciſt at raiſing and laying of Spirits. In this Caſe there would a whole Legion appear, ſome from one Coaſt, ſome from another (for I account of needleſs Objections to obſtruct Peace but as Evil Spirits)

Spirits) ſome are already raiſed, I ſhall try my ſmall Skill to lay them, though I confeſs it is ſo much out of my Way, that I ſhall but ſlightly perform what I undertake.

OBJECTION I.

If the Diſſenters ſhould comply, yet they would ſtill hold up the old Differences, there would ſtill be a Schiſm in the Church; and that it would be more dangerous to have an Enemy in the City, than one in the open Field.

ANSWER.

This is but Suppoſition, it ſhows no good Chriſtian Temper, to damn and ſtifle an Act of Favour and Charity, upon Conjecture and Suppoſition, That the Charity will not be rightly employed: This would too much confine Charity, and give too great a Latitude for ſuch to deny, who may rather want Exhortation to ſtir them up.

Want of preferment makes Mutineers in the State: gratifie them and they are eaſie. So in this Caſe, yield in ſome things, and they will be eaſie in the reſt, when preferred. Men are but Men, to juſtifie themſelves (in what they have done) to the reſt of the Diſſenters, they will then juſtifie and defend our Eſtabliſhment ſo altered.

Again, 'Tis more than probable they will do ſo; for, thoſe of the ſame Principles, both Miniſters and People, who conformed at *Bartholomew*-Tide, upon the Act of Uniformity, and thoſe who have from Time to Time ſince conformed, have in the general behaved themſelves peaceably and decently towards the Church: If an imprudent Man in a County, have done otherwiſe, he hath but expoſed himſelf, to defile the Neſt of his own chuſing. But this ſmall Inconvenience hath been much overballanced by thoſe of the ſame Party, who have not only lived peaceably, but concernedly defended our Eſtabliſhment.

And can it be ſuppoſed, That thoſe, who we hope to gain now, will be leſs ſo, when ſo many things then ſcrupled at, will (as is ſuppoſed) be taken away?

OBJECT. II.

If the Church ſhould yield to take away ſome Things, the Diſſenters will not be ſatisfied, they will ſtill be craving more and more Alterations.

ANSWER.

'Tis difficult to ſet Bounds to Man's Deſires, therefore hard to anſwer this Objection in the Negative, That they will not.

But,

But, if one who is weak and faint, deſires a Glaſs of Wine of you, for his neceſſary refreſhment; to deny him at all, would ſhew a want of common Compaſſion. But 'twould be very harſh, to add to your denial, the aggravating Circumſtance, That you would not give him one Glaſs, leſt he ſhould crave another and another, until he were drunk, ſince it is in your own power, to put a ſtop to your kindneſs as ſoon as you pleaſe.

Beſides, the *Diſſenters*, while things are in agitation and debate, may ask a greater Price than they will take, when the Church hath granted what ſhe ſhall think fit, and hath fix'd down an *Hercules*'s Pillar for this Age: Then the *Diſſenters* will pauſe upon't, and conſider what they have got, and (perhaps) find they have enough, and acquieſce, and be ſatisfied. As while a Man is eating, his Stomach may crave more and more; but if he ſtop a little before ſatiety, the Stomach will cloſe, and the craving ceaſe.

OBJECT. III.

By making ſuch Alterations (perhaps) many of the Church may take ſuch offence as to leave her Communion; and ſo, like the Sea, what's gain'd in one place, would be loſt in another; and that the gain (though equal in numbers) would not be an Equivalent for the loſs.

AN-

ANSWER.

The Alterations being to be limited to indifferent things, if any ſhould refuſe Communion for ſuch cauſe, then the Argument uſed againſt *Diſſenters* would turn upon themſelves, *viz.* That People are bound in Conſcience to obey the Magiſtrates Sanctions in things indifferent.

OBJECT. IV.

Whatever hath been of primitive uſage in the Church (though indifferent things) ought to be continued, unleſs ſome great neceſſity urge the contrary.

ANSWER.

Peace and Unity in the Church and State are the preſſing Reaſons for taking them away; no other Expedient hath hitherto, nor ever will ('tis probable) prevail.

If the Church for this cauſe ſhall yield them up, ſhe will thereby ſhew a more Primitive Chriſtian temper, than by retaining them, though the *Diſſenters* (perhaps) ſhew more Zeal than Learning, in inſiſting ſo poſitively to have them taken away.

OB-

OBJECT. V.

Why don't the *Diſſenters* propoſe what Alterations would ſatisfie? For it ſhews too much inconſtancy and inſtability in the Church, to be ſo often altering, unleſs they were aſſured they could effect the Good deſigned thereby.

ANSWER.

I confeſs, ſince (as is ſuppos'd) the Church is willing to part with ſomething to buy Peace, the *Diſſenters* (I ſhould think) ſhould ſet the price, and then the Church would bid.

But if they don't, or are ſo inconſiſtent among themſelves, as they can't agree about it, to *follow peace with all men*, is a Chriſtian Precept; and in this caſe it can ſcarce fail of having the effect deſign'd.——— For upon the Act of Uniformity (as above) many, both Miniſters and People, did conform, and ſome ſince, from time to time.

So that (upon the whole Matter) we may reaſonably ſuppoſe, all that Party are very near conforming.——— Surely then they will all come in, when the Church ſhall have remov'd their moſt material *Stumbling-blocks* (as they count them) to clear the way for their entrance.

entrance.———However, ſome will be gain'd; and if ſo, the Church will have no cauſe to repent of her *labour of Love and Charity.* ———*There ought to be a care to ſeek and bring in one loſt Sheep, even to the preſent neglect of the whole Flock.*

OBJECT. VI

The laſt Objection will be made to my ſelf by both Parties, *viz.* That I being a *Layman*, ought not to put my Sickle into other Peoples Harveſt; and that I engage in a Cauſe too weighty and unwieldy for me to manage; and that I am by no means competent for ſuch an Undertaking.

ANSWER.

Though I put my Sickle into other Peoples Harveſt, it is not to rob them of their Corn, but only to cut up the Weeds (*viz.* Diviſions and Diſſentions) which hinder its growth and thriving: And I hope I ſhall not be accounted a Damage-Pheſant Treſpaſſer for that.

Again, in the Province I undertake, no ſuch great Learning is required, it being chiefly to labour between Party and Party to make general Propoſals of Reconciliation. I know they muſt ſtep cautiouſly, who travel in this way:

way: And 'tis very probable I ſhall have the ſame Fate with thoſe Arbitrators who diſpleaſe both Parties; yet let it be remembred (by the bye) that ſuch Deciſions are uſually moſt juſt.

And further, all I pretend to, is, only to draw a rough draught of theſe Matters; to give the hint to ſome better hand to repreſent them more to the Life; and that ſome *Lay-man* (not too much engaged in a Party) and whoſe Talent may be ſufficient for ſuch an Undertaking, when they ſhall find how I have ſullied and blemiſht a good Cauſe by ill management, may be provoked to handle theſe Matters with ſuch Prudence and Moderation as the Subject doth deſerve and require.——— And if this ſmall Pains ſhall but occaſion ſo probable a Good, *that* will be as great a Recompence and Satisfaction as I can hope for or deſire: and, as a Great Man ſaith of Experimental Philoſophy, That the Experiments ought not to be ſorted and ranged under proper Heads, *&c.* leſt ſuch method too much confine further Improvements; ſo ſince what I offer, is but as hints to others, I may perhaps be ſomewhat excus'd, if the method be ſomewhat broken and confus'd. And though I ſometimes place that under one Head which belongs to another, like an unskilful Carver, who carves part of the Wing to the Leg, or the contrary; however, if (as in Carving) the whole ſub-

ſtance, or any thing to purpoſe, be found any where, 'tis leſs matter though Method be not ſo exact.

After I ſaw [*Vox Cleri*] I attempted to Anſwer ſome Objections there made, before the *Anſwer* came out; which, I muſt own, hath anſwer'd them a thouſand times better; yet here being ſome bye hints (tho' not much to the purpoſe) I let them paſs. I have not ſeen any thing of this Subject, but *Vox Cleri*, and the *Anſwer* to it.

FINIS.

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